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U.S. said to send millions to Nicaraguan opposition

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Washington—The Reagan administration is providing millions of dollars in covert aid to individuals and private organizations in Nicaragua in hopes of bolstering moderate forces in that nation, according to senior administration officials.

The effort, which is being managed by the Central Intelligence Agency, began late last year after it was approved by President Reagan, these officials said.

They said that Mr. Reagan and his national security advisers rejected a proposal to fund the creation of a paramilitary force in Central America.

Several South American nations, however, including Argentina and Venezuela, are working together to assemble paramilitary units that would infiltrate Nicaragua for hit-and-run attacks against government troops and installations, these officials said.

The Reagan administration is aware of the formation of these units, according to the officials, but has declined to provide financial or military support.

"The president and the National Security Council looked over proposals to create our own paramilitary force, but once the idea of using former Nicaraguan national guard commanders was rejected, there didn't seem to be a feasible way to do it," recalled a senior administration official familiar with the deliberations that took place last November.

Mr. Reagan decided, officials said, to approve the less risky option of secretly financing individuals and private organizations that oppose Nicaragua's government.

The country has been governed since 1979 by a nine-member Sandinist National Directorate made up of the leaders of the revolution that

overthrew the government of Gen. Anastasio Somoza Debayle. A three-man junta administers the country.

The Reagan administration has accused the Sandinist government of promoting Soviet and Cuban interests in Central America, including providing military and financial assistance to guerrillas in El Salvador. Sandinist leaders, who describe themselves as Marxist reformers, have denied the charges.

On Tuesday, the Reagan administration made public aerial photographs which intelligence officials said proved that Nicaragua, with Soviet and Cuban assistance, was creating the largest military force in Central America.

The Nicaraguan government yesterday protested against American flights over Nicaragua, calling the

reconnaissance a flagrant violation of international law. It also accused the United States of trying to convert Nicaragua into "another Chile" by ousting the junta.

Nicaraguan Ambassador Francisco Fiallos Navarro, in an ABC-TV appearance, called the U.S. allegations of a major military buildup by his country "totally false."

Then Directorate member Jaime Wheelock, speaking at a news conference, denied allegations that Nicaraguan pilots are being trained in Bulgaria, but was vague on whether Nicaragua plans to acquire MiG fighters from the Soviet Union.

Mr. Wheelock said the military buildup was mainly defensive, and also called for development of "a normal constructive relationship with the government of the United States."

The Reagan administration's review last fall of covert action options in Central America was prompted partly by the reconnaissance photos and a growing belief within the administration that the Sandinist government was becoming a surrogate of Cuba and the Soviet Union, senior American officials said.

The options presented to the National Security Council November 19 covered many proposals, according to these officials, including the one for creating an American-sponsored paramilitary force.

This and several other options were sent back to intelligence agencies for further study, they said. When the ideas were submitted again for discussion at a National Security Council meeting later that month, the paramilitary option was rejected because it seemed to require the use of former Nicaraguan national guard officers who had supported General Somoza.

"We realized that the surest way to have this kind of project backfire would be if Somoza's military men were involved," one official recalled.

The administration was aware, these officials added, that Argentina, Venezuela and other South American nations were trying to assemble a force for deployment in Central America.

The U.S. plan approved by Mr. Reagan may eventually cost more

than the nearly \$20 million projected as the price of forming and supporting a paramilitary force, administration officials said.

In a press briefing Tuesday, Adm. Bobby R. Inman, the deputy director of central intelligence, was asked about reports in *The Washington Post* that the United States had approved \$19 million to support covert action in Nicaragua.

He replied, "I would suggest to you that \$19 or \$29 million isn't going to buy you much of any kind these days, and certainly not against that kind of military force."